

“The Jesus-Centered Mind” Ecclesiastes 9:11-18 Sunday **9AM**

As God is calling us to live with our fixation upon His Son, Jesus, we must recognize that nearly everything in our culture and in our own flesh opposes this calling from Him. Is it possible for the Christian to have the best of both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this age? Can we live in true abandonment to God and still funnel our time, energies and resources into getting the best out of this world? King Solomon offers counsel on these matters, and calls us to have a mind continually fixated on God while we remain aware of that moment where we stand before Him to receive a verdict concerning the final value of our lives. No matter how we began this journey, are we being intentional about how we will finish? Do we have a Jesus-centered mind?

I. Our Susceptibility to Improperly Trust (11-12)

A. What we assume (11a) - “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge...”

There is a near-global human assumption that the position of advantage is what we all need. Words like strongest, wealthiest, prettiest, smartest, fastest, tallest carry with them an assumed promise of victory. Solomon, having been granted the gift of wisdom directly from God, is now dispelling the myth from the perspective of the end of everyone’s race. He is going to tell us that, in the end, there really was no significant advantage because we all end up experiencing the same finish line: **Death**.

B. What we ignore (11b-12) - “...but time and chance happen to them all. 12 For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.”

Death is the great equalizer. Nobody is in charge of their entrance into earth and nobody is in full control of the time of their exit from here. When Solomon declares that “time and chance happen to them all”, he is teaching that the harsh reality of all of our lives is that death pounces upon whom it pounces. Theologically speaking, there is no such thing as chance. However, from a merely human perspective, death clearly finds the young and the old, the wealthy and the poor, the impressive and the forgotten. Death is no discriminator - it comes for one and all. Using the animal kingdom as an example, Solomon pictures a fish which was merely swimming one moment and then

caught in an unforeseen net the very next moment. He does the same thing when he writes of a bird being caught in a hunter's trap. Death finds unsuspecting people every single day, and it does not matter if that person is strong, wise, beautiful or impressive. In the end, all of our life-strengths are no match for death when it knocks on our door.

II. Our Tendency to Proudly Forget (13-15)

A. We can forget our former helplessness (13-14) - “I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.”

Moving from the myth of the permanency of human strength, Solomon uses an account of a vulnerable little city being surrounded by a powerful opposing king and his army. The story is meant to impart wisdom to us as we consider the helplessness of the doomed city. There was no clear way of escape for them. Surrounded, overpowered and soon to fall, the little city had no answers. This is an accurate representation of every believer's situation prior to their salvation through Christ. We were incapable of delivering ourselves from the power of Satan, the condemnation from our sin and the weakness of our own flesh. We had been besieged and, no matter how old we were when we accepted Christ, were sinners by nature and by choice. What is the future for such a person? Full judgment and eternal condemnation. Our spiritual reality was parallel to the doom of the little city in Solomon's account.

B. We can get disconnected from our rescue (15a) - “But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city.”

Nobody could have seen this turn of events coming. There arose from nowhere an outwardly unimpressive man who possessed hidden wisdom which delivered the entire city from their coming destruction. Though we are not told just what it was that he offered as a plan of escape, we are made aware that, whatever it was, it was 100% successful. The odds had been reversed. The enemy had been defeated. Life was snatched from the mouth of death. There was no committee, no team and no collaboration. This singular man, poor though he was, delivered everyone from death and destruction. He saved them all.

C. We can default to proud independence (15b) - “Yet no one remembered that poor man.”

And there it is: **the one who saved them was soon forgotten.** We might reasonably assume that this poor man who rescued his people would have been honored or promoted. They should have regarded him as the most important man in the city. Streets could be named after him. A palace should be built for him. Gifts of gratitude might well have been laid at his feet for, apart from his intervention, all of them would have perished. Yet, in Solomon’s account, the painful, unjust reality is placed before us: **the city’s savior was forgotten.** This is convicting because we are prone to do the exact same thing concerning the One who rescued us. Jesus takes care of our sin, our guilt, our condemnation and redeems us from the hand of the enemy. He bears the wrath of the Father in His own sinless body. He dies in our place so that we may live in His presence. Sadly, it is not uncommon for many who receive the great gift of eternal life to end up defaulting to living independently of the One who saved them. We do not always live remembering the King who was made poor for our sakes. Life becomes about building up our own city, cultivating our own positions of advantage, reaching our own goals and fulfilling our own dreams. Yes, we must face it: all of us can potentially live with long periods of forgetting the Savior who rescued us from the doom pronounced against us. Saved from helplessness by the wisdom and love of Jesus, only to live in proud independence from Him - these things should never be true of us. Listen to what God spoke through Moses to the children of Israel as He was about to take them into the land of their inheritance:

Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17-18 - “Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His rules and His statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... 17 Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ 18 You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

III. Our Need To Recalibrate Spiritually (16-18)

A. The remnant's understanding (16) - “But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.”

What did Solomon desire for us to learn from what he wrote? His conclusions are these:

1. It was only the poor man's wisdom which delivered the city from the might of the enemy. The clear application is that we should never trust in human strength - however it might be displayed. Ultimately, the enemy of our souls is stronger than us if we are living independently of God. Life itself can be seemingly random and full of little ambushes which will not allow for our own power to deliver us. Yet, Kingdom wisdom from God's Word and from the guidance of the Holy Spirit can rescue us time and again from the things which threaten us. Solomon teaches that spiritual wisdom is better than human might.

2. Even if the majority of people forget/despise the wisdom of Jesus found in His Gospel, the principle that Solomon is releasing is that it is still more reliable in the end than human logic and power. Remember, the early verses reveal that the great equalizer is death. That is the finish line. It is appointed to human beings to die, and then to stand before God to be judged. At that unavoidable moment of eternal accountability it will not matter who was the strongest, wealthiest, prettiest, smartest, fastest, or shrewdest. The foundation of our hope for that day of reckoning is the wisdom of the poor man - the man, Jesus Christ. Did we remember Him? Did we live according to His wisdom? Did we refuse to trust in ourselves and what we can accomplish? The majority will despise the wisdom of Jesus. We must refuse to live that way. We must treasure His ways above every other possible way of living. The poor man wins in the end.

B. The secret place for wisdom (17) - “The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”

So, how do we gain this wisdom? Solomon draws a distinction between the incessant, loud barking of the culture versus the quiet Kingdom-whispers that come from God. The ways of humanism, trusting in ourselves, are streamed toward us through innumerable means. The culture is loud and offers us a non-stop feed of its logic, reason and presumption. Christians must remember that loud & frequent ≠ true. The fools shout out their corroded wisdom all the time. When God wants to communicate to us the most valuable things, He whispers them. Only those who have drawn close to Him

can hear His whispers. The rest will give themselves to the roars of fools.

C. The reason to remain vigilant (18) - “Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”

Solomon ends with a statement of truth coupled with a sobering warning. God’s wisdom will remain the source of victory for all who live in allegiance to His ways. We will encounter many wars which will not allow us to overcome if we trust in our own strengths. God will get all the glory if we will trust His counterintuitive ways. Yet, there is a warning for us to heed: we can experience so much good as we live according to the poor man’s wisdom. We will see breakthrough, triumph, satisfaction, peace and joy as we faithfully follow Jesus, the one who delivered us from the enemy. Yet, in that commitment to follow Him, there is a risk that, if we give ourselves for even a moment to the thoughts, ways and counsel of the “sinner”, destruction can remove all the good which we have experienced. What is Solomon saying here? He is teaching us to remain vigilant. Do not allow the sinful, self-centered ways of the world undermine, even for one moment, the wisdom that God offers us through Christ. Solomon wants us to finish well.

11:15AM Notes Below

“Cultivating Secret Moments” Mark 1:40-45 Sunday 11:15AM

In a world filled with unbridled public consumption of social media feeds, reality television, and unceasing torrents of news and entertainment, where are the places of private, secret moments with Jesus to be found? Just as wise spouses never share details of their marital intimacy, Christians need to consider that God desires some private, sequestered encounters with us that remain between us and Him. Yes, He wants you to Himself sometimes. In this message, Jesus provides a miraculous breakthrough to a dying leper. He then gives one statement of instruction to the newly rescued man. The man's response to His command affords opportunity for all of us to discern how sacred our own private encounters are with the Savior. Are we cultivating secret moments that continue to remain between us and Him?

I. The Posture of Brokenness (40)

“And a leper came to Him, imploring him, and kneeling said to Him, “If You will, You can make me clean.”

It is difficult for us to feel the drama in this scene. Leprosy was a condition that was irreversible in the days of Jesus. The consequences of contracting leprosy were graphic as lesions would appear on the outer surface of the skin. Left untreated, the disease would eventually eat away at the flesh of the person. Sensation would be lost in the parts of the body being consumed by the spreading sores. It was not uncommon for fingers, toes, lips, ears, noses and other parts of the body to rot fully away and eventually fall off. The rotting flesh would usually hold a terrible stench so that the afflicted person was set outside of city gates to die alone. The best a leper could hope for was the mercy and charity of those who passed him by as he begged. Judaism also called for religious separation from lepers, so they were typically forced to live away from their families and refused entrance into the temple. It was forbidden by the Law of Moses to touch lepers as it would ceremonially defile the person who made contact with them. We are not told what stage of decay this particular leprous man was in. We do know that it was a captivating scene as the poor, helpless, dying and isolated man approached Jesus in desperation for healing. His bold declaration of confidence that Jesus could heal him if he so desired would have brought silence from the onlookers. Drama hangs in the air as everyone waits to hear what Jesus will say and to watch for what He might do.

II. The Touch We All Need (41-42)

“Moved with pity, He stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

Astonishingly, Jesus does the unthinkable. Before saying a word, Jesus makes contact with the diseased man. When was the last time anyone had showed compassion to this man? Had it been weeks, months or even years since he had experienced physical contact with another human? Mark notes that Jesus was motivated in His heart to rescue this man. He had pity on his torturous situation. The man’s suffering was personally felt by Jesus as He looked at him. The action of human touch was also important to Jesus when He ministered to people. As God, He did not ever need to make physical contact to affect healing in afflicted people. Yet we find on many occasions that He intentionally uses the touch of love to connect with those who were desperate for His help. As He makes contact with the leper, He also relieves the man’s concern that Jesus might not even want to heal him. He says, “I will, be clean.” The Savior wanted the man to know that He actually wanted to heal him. This question still weighs heavily on our hearts 2,000 years later. Does God desire to heal me? Could it be God’s will that I not be healed? This man did not yet know the heart of Jesus, so he wondered what the Savior wanted to do. Jesus says, “I will to heal you - I want to do this!” Jesus then commands the man’s body to be restored to wholeness. He cured the leper from his disease with the power of His voice. Every lesion disappeared. Any parts of his body that had fallen off from decay were miraculously restored. His skin became like new and he received an instantaneous miracle from the healing ministry of God’s Son.

III. Jesus’ Invitation into the Secret Place (43-44)

“And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

After the full healing was secured, Jesus immediately gives the newly delivered man an assignment to obey. In accordance with **Leviticus 14:2-8**, Jesus wanted the man to be declared fully healed by the priests so that he could be restored back to the social and religious arenas from which his leprosy had previously disqualified him. The man’s deliverance did not free him from accountability and submission to the ways of God. Mark says that Jesus *sternly charged him* to follow the prescription of the Law for

all who are healed from leprosy. Additionally, the man was forbidden from going public with the account of Jesus healing. It is not profitable for us to theorize on why Jesus wanted this to be kept secret, but it was clearly not His will that this deed be made known to others. We might learn from this that it is sometimes the heart of God that we share with Him personal and private experiences. There are pearls that He will offer you that are not meant for public consumption. Just as a husband and wife do not share details of their marital intimacy with others, there are experiences that Christians have with God that are meant to be kept intentionally private. Salvation is intensely personal to the One who died to provide it. Jesus wants time that is simply *you-and-Him*. In our day where it is so common for us to use social media to put on display so much of our lives, we do well to honor God by allowing the preciousness and sacredness of certain encounters with Him to remain between us and Him. Jesus told this man with a new lease on life to keep quiet about it.

IV. The Breach of Intimacy (45)

“But He went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Admittedly, it would be very difficult to keep quiet about such a miracle. The man knew, however, what he had been commanded by Jesus. He blatantly disobeyed the Master. The result was that, as the miracle became sensationalized by the people who heard, large crowds swamped Jesus and the disciples. In the end, Jesus had to leave that area because the people were abuzz with the news of the miraculous. If the man had only honored Jesus' command, none of this would have occurred. Like many believers who receive the gift of eternal life from Christ, but who do not honor Him with precise obedience, this man proved himself more self-centered than Jesus-centered. It could be said of him that he was:

***Touched with power but not with humility
Touched by gratitude but not by obedience
Touched by zeal but not by wisdom
Touched with power but not with love
Touched for the heights of the miraculous but not for
the depths of sacredness***

The healed man breached the intimacy and sacredness that Jesus asked him to enter into as a new disciple. The man received his gift and immediately began to ignore the Lordship of the One who saved him. May all believers take an inventory of life to discern if they have been too casual, too unguarded and too indiscriminate with sharing details of their secret moments with the Lord. He loves it when we cherish those precious encounters. Not everything is meant to be shared. The cultivation of secret moments with Jesus is a precious desire that the Holy Spirit will birth in our hearts. When those moments come, let us be mature in considering that it might not be the will of God for them to be shared with others. A mark of maturity is that we do not sensationalize our encounters with God. Christianity is not meant to be a reality-show wherein everything is laid before the eyes of others. When we encounter God in precious ways, do not rush to social media and cast pearls before swine. When God downloads a whisper of insight or wisdom, resist the urge to offer it up to others without praying first. Maybe it was for you. Maybe it was for only you. As the Father witnesses us treasure and properly steward those secret moments with Him, we are likely to experience more of them. He does not need us to be His marketing team. He loves us as His own, sometimes as if we were the only ones who belonged to Him. Let us honor Him in ways that reveal that He is as precious to us as we are to Him.